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VIETNAMESE ELECTIONS

1. Final Declaration of the Geneva Conference, July 21, 1954

"#7. The Conference declares that, so far as Vietnam is concerned, the settlement of political problems, effected on the basis of respect for the principles of independence, unity and territorial integrity, shall permit the Vietnamese people to enjoy the fundamental freedoms, guaranteed by democratic institutions established as a result of free general elections by secret ballot. In order to insure that sufficient progress in the restoration of peace has been made, and that all the necessary conditions obtain for free expression of the national will, general elections shall be held in July 1956, under supervision of the International Commission . . . "

2. Protest by the Vietnamese Delegation Against the Geneva Conference Agreements, July 21, 1954

Immediately following the Final Declaration of the Geneva Conference, the delegation of the State of Viet-Nam protested the summary rejection of its proposal which called for a armistice without division and the institution of a provisional control by the UN over the entire territory pending the reestablishment of peace and arrangements permitting free elections.

3. Vietnamese Position on the Election

By 1956, the RVN had established itself as an independent state determined to resist outside pressures and follow its own course. SVN did not feel itself obliged to hold elections that would have greatly favored the North, and which it had never approved. The GVN based its position on legal grounds, as it was not bound by a declaration it had neither signed nor participated in drafting. Additionally, it was argued that a country cannot be expected to acquiesce in its own dissolution, since the firm control apparatus and the large population in the North would have put the South in a fatal disadvantage.

It should be noted that elections for a SVN government were held in 1956 and again in 1959, but a plebescite for reunification was opposed by the GVN on the grounds enumerated above.

4. Statement of President Diem in January 1955

"The clauses providing for the 1956 elections are extremely vague. But at one point they are clear--in stipulating that the elections are to be free. Everything will now depend on how free elections are defined. The President said he would wait to see whether the conditions of freedom would exist in North Viet-Nam at the time scheduled for the elections. He asked what would be the good of an impartial counting of votes if the voting had been preceded in North Viet-Nam by the ruthless propaganda and terrorism on the part of a police state."

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5. U. S. Positions (Excerpted from William Bundy Speech, May 13, 1965)

The 1954 Geneva Accords had provided for free elections by secret ballot in 1956, and it has been alleged that the failure to proceed with these elections in some way justified Hanoi's action in resorting to military measures, first slowly and then by the stepped-up infiltration beginning in 1959 and 1960.

The facts are quite otherwise. The Eisenhower Administration had fully supported the principle of free elections under international supervision, in Viet-Nam as in other situations where a country was divided, Korea and Germany.

When the issue of free elections arose concretely in 1956, the regime in Hanoi--while it kept calling for elections in its propaganda--made no effort to respond to the call of the Soviet Union and Great Britain, as Co-Chairmen of the 1954 Geneva Conference, for the setting up of the appropriate machinery for free elections.

The reason is not far to seek. For North Viet-Nam in 1956--and indeed today--is a Communist state and in 1956, North Viet-Nam was in deep trouble. Its own leaders admitted as much in their party congress in the fall of 1956 in a statement by General Giap referring to widespread terror, failure to respect the principles of faith and worship in the so-called land reform program, the use of torture as a normal practice, and a whole list of excesses which even the Communists had come to realize went too far.

So the answer is simple. There was no chance of free elections in North Viet-Nam in 1956. We shall wait to see whether there will ever be such a chance in the future.

SVN: Goals and elections

Attitude of Saigonese seems to be (Unger, reporting on visit: July 22, 1965) that VC would triumph in open political competition (of the sort proposed by Whiting), because of their unity in the face of ~~some~~ chaotic competition of political groups on other side ((not to mention their possible: better appeal; and better campaigning). These ~~politi~~ politicians/military are "apprehensive about peace" and opposed to any talk of negotiation.

This would imply that the desirable situations from their point of view were:

- 1) Indefinite prolongation of conflict, at current (or preferably, better: e.g., 1962) level, with US military preventing military takeover by VC; or else
- 2) "Victory" to the point where the VC--even if not wiped out--could be suppressed from any political activity. Since there would still, probably, be many VC-supporters and underground cadre, this would mean a considerable repressiveness in Saigon regime. Thus, "desirable" outcome would ~~for~~ be the achievement of an effective, stable, police state.

With their expectations, any indication that US goal was a situation permitting free political activity might be seen by them as directly threatening

Tran Van Do argument against dealing with VC: tantamount to recognizing rebellion and subversion, to rewarding armed aggression, and to permitting Communists to play role of Trojan Horse. Saigon 53, July 6, 1965